

Message Text

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ORIGIN EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 ORM-02 DHA-02 CIAE-00

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APPROVED BY EA:RHMILLER

D/HA:SLOWMAN

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMCONSUL HONG KONG IMMEDIATE

USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY RANGOON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SREF

SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES BOAT CASES

REF: A) HONG KONG 8368 (NOTAL); B) HONG KONG 8394 (NOTAL);

C) GENEVA 5673 (NOTAL)

1. UK EMBASSY OFFICER CALLED ON DEPTOFF (COUNTRY DIRECTOR FOR VIETNAM, LAOS AND CAMBODIA AFFAIRS) JULY 16 TO RAISE CASE OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES ABOARD BURMESE SHIP AVA. HE GAVE RUNDOWN OF FACTS ON CASE AND PRESENT STATUS OF REFUGEES. HE SAID THAT BECAUSE OF ITS OWN PROBLEMS WITH REFUGEES FROM CHINA, HGK INTENDED TO REFUSE PERMISSION FOR REFUGEES TO LAND AND WOULD REQUIRE THE BURMESE VESSEL TO TAKE THEM ELSEWHERE, POSSIBLY YOKOHAMA AS ITS NEXT PORT OF

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CALL. HE NOTED THAT WHILE HKG HAD BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THE

UNHCR, IT WAS NOT SANGUINE ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LATTER IN HANDLING OF THE SITUATION. THIS WAS BASED UPON HKG'S EXPERIENCE WITH UNHCR LAST YEAR WHEN IT WAS APPARENTLY UNABLE TO FULFILL REASSURANCES OF RESETTLEMENT ELSEWHERE OF SEVERAL THOUSAND INDOCHINA REFUGEES IN HONG KONG.

2. UK EMBOFF SAID THAT HIS PRIMARY PURPOSE WAS TO INFORM THE DEPARTMENT ABOUT THE MATTER BUT THAT HE WOULD ALSO BE INTERESTED IN OUR REACTION TO IT. DEPTOFF REPLIED THAT

WE WERE AWARE OF THE PROBLEM THROUGH REPORTS FROM OUR CONGEN IN HONG KONG BUT APPRECIATED FURTHER DETAILS HE HAD JUST PROVIDED. DEPTOFF NOTED THAT MATTER SEEMED TO BE ONE PRIMARILY FOR THE HKG AND UNHCR TO RESOLVE, BUT THAT THE U.S. WOULD CERTAINLY NOT WISH TO SEE ANY ACTION TAKEN WHICH RESULTED IN THE INVOLUNTARY RETURN OF THE REFUGEES TO VIETNAM. MOREOVER, FROM HUMANITARIAN STANDPOINT IT SEEMS TO US THAT HKG, RATHER THAN SIMPLY SEEKING TO TRANSFER THE PROBLEM ELSEWHERE, SHOULD PERMIT THE REFUGEES TO LAND IN ORDER TO GIVE THE UNHCR A CHANCE TO HANDLE THEM.

3. DEPTOFF ALSO NOTED THIS WAS LIKELY TO BE A RECURRING PROBLEM FOR HKG. HE SAID IT STRIKES US THAT UNHCR SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED RATHER THAN DISCOURAGED AT THIS POINT IF IT IS TO PLAY AN EFFECTIVE ROLE. WE WOULD OF COURSE BE PREPARED TO HELP WITHIN THE LIMITS AND PROCEDURES OF OUR OWN PROGRAMS UK EMBOFF CONFIRMED THAT CONGEN OFFICERS HAD ALREADY INTERVIEWED THE REFUGEES ABOARD THE AVA.

4. UK EMBOFF EMPHASIZED THAT HKG HAD NOT YET FINALLY MADE UP ITS MIND. HE ASKED WHETHER WE WOULD ALSO BE WILLING TO WEIGH IN WITH THE UNHCR TO ASSURE THEIR EFFECTIVE HANDLING OF THE REFUGEES SHOULD THEY BE ALLOWED TO LAND IN HONG KONG. DEPTOFF SAID HE THOUGHT WE WERE ALREADY DOING SO (THIS WAS BEFORE RECEIPT OF REFTEL C).

5. UK EMBOFF SAID THAT HKG WAS ALSO CONSIDERING ASKING UNHCR TO FLY THE REFUGEES TO RANGOON PENDING RESETTLEMENT ELSEWHERE. HOWEVER, HE WAS NOT OPTIMISTIC EITHER THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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UNHCR OR THE GUB WOULD AGREE TO THIS SCHEME. KISSINGER

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